

SHUTESBURY SCHOOL COMMITTEE
THURSDAY, April 14, 2016
Final Minutes

Present: Dan Hayes, Katie Fiander, Steve Sullivan, members; Fred Steinberg, Chair; Jackie Mendonsa, Principal; Jennifer Haggerty, Superintendent; Public Guests

A. Meeting Called to Order at 7:10 P.M.

B. Review of Agenda and Perpetual Calendar

C. Warrants and Gifts

#5008: \$1,832.18

#322: \$62,943.98 (Payroll)

D. Approval of Minutes from March 17, 2016.

KATIE MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF MARCH 17, 2016. FRED SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

E. Public Comments and Announcements

F. New Business / Discussion Items:

1. Identification of School Choice Seats: Jackie requested that SSC vote on whether to offer School Choice seats next year. She said that 5 1st Grade seats will definitely be open, with the possibility of 2nd Grade seats as well. Siblings will also be allowed to attend. The final number of seats will be determined before June 1. Dan wondered what we might learn about the process to fill seats from other U#28 schools that participate in School Choice; Jackie and Jennifer said they'd reach out to SRS and LES. Dan suggested looking into the lottery process at charter schools as well.

DAN MOVED TO APPROVE OPENING SCHOOL CHOICE SEATS AT SES FOR THE NEXT SCHOOL YEAR, WITH THE FINAL NUMBER OF SEATS TO BE DETERMINED BY ADMINISTRATION. FRED SECONDED. UNANIMOUS (ONE ABSTENTION: STEVE).

2. Substitute Wages: For a licensed teacher, the current rate is \$70/day. Steve pointed out that these have not been raised since 1997. Jackie added that it's not easy getting substitutes to come out to SES, either. Dan asked about comparable rates at other schools; Amherst's are higher. Jackie suggested at least \$90/day for a substitute because it's very hard for SES to attract subs who are talented with the kids and who want to drive up here; they like the school, but geographic remoteness is a factor. The committee felt that they needed to confirm with Aaron that this would be financially feasible given the current budget before raising the rates. Jennifer promised to go over the proposal with Aaron before the May meeting.

3. Standardized Testing Conversation: Dan clarified that he's not pushing for opting out; he simply feels that it's important for information to be shared and for there to be significant dialogue. One caveat is that as chair of CES, he does see how sharing information naturally leads to specific decisions. In this case, CES compiled data on enrollment and financial trends that clearly indicate charter schools negatively impact rural school districts. Sen. Rosenberg is now able to use this information to make the case against more charter schools in rural areas; the recently-passed Senate bill addressed many of our schools' concerns on this matter. Dan wants people to have the relevant data so that they can make informed decisions. He went on to cite the recent forum with a DESE representative in which people

from rural communities talked about the negative impact of standardized testing. By sharing information and collecting data, we can make ourselves better heard in Boston.

Jackie said that concern with standardized testing is not very great in the community; no one has approached her about it. The school culture doesn't emphasize the importance of the test to students, and students even report that they like it (including the snacks). She has some concerns with the tests being used now, but also sees that the test has improved with feedback. Teachers in attendance spoke of their concerns about potentially dropping to a Level 3 school due to a less than 90% participation rate; they also affirmed that almost nobody in the community is concerned about it, and that students approach the test in a positive way. They also want students to have a positive growth mindset when it comes to taking tests, and to develop test-taking schools. As for students who show signs of anxiety, some parents have expressed the feeling that learning to deal with such anxiety is a part of growing up; they will have to learn how to deal with stress in life. The teachers concluded by indicating they do not support opting out.

Steve said that SES has always downplayed the tests, and that 3rd Graders seem most affected by them, becoming worried that they would let down their teachers and friends, and the school as a whole. Dan reiterated SSC's support for the teachers to freely discuss school issues like standardized testing and encouraged both teachers and administration to continue to share their thoughts openly; he also encouraged them to write letters and communicate in other ways with state government about these issues.

4. Revisioning Union #28: Jennifer offered a presentation of broad, brainstorming ideas she, Aaron, and Prudy put together about the future of U#28. Options include expanding schools to K-8, creating a U#28 Middle and High School, and creating a Centralized Data position among others. The presentation included initial financial plans from Aaron to give a general sense of what K-8 and MHS options would do to our budgets; a K-8 expansion would result in savings ranging from \$65,000 to \$240,000 depending on the town. They also conducted a SWOT analysis for each of these plans. The MHS option would be combined with a vocational school focused on forestry and agriculture or a farm school. The projected enrollment for the MHS is in the same range as the schools we currently send our students to. The spending on this school is in the range of \$11 million, which is in the ballpark as well (this figure is a very conservative estimate). The MHS would be centrally located in the Wendell State Forest or Lake Wyola area; it would also house the U#28 Central Offices. They have begun to take next steps to gather more information about these proposals, as directed by JSC at their last meeting. Jennifer then invited questions and comments from SSC.

Steve noted that as it is, 6th Graders are quite ready to move on as we head into mid-April. Dan responded that if you look at charter schools, there are often models that take students all the way through 12th Grade. Steve expressed an interest in talking with students who have gone through the same school K-12; the students get to know each other so well, they can all push each other's buttons by 3rd Grade. Dan said that he sees Middle School as being a period of flux for kids in any case. Katie said there might be more interest in looking at the 7-12 option because of the transition that kids go through at that age. A teacher in attendance praised the presentation for its thoughtfulness, especially its inclusion of vocational training for agriculture. SSC also praised the presentation.

G. Unfinished Business / Updates: None.

H. Policy Review

First Reading on:

DI-A – Food Service Accounts Policy

JLCG – Head Lice Policy

GBED – Smoking and Tobacco Use on School Property by Staff Members

Fred offered to edit the policies. Steve asked a question about families who choose not to use recommended products, perhaps going the “natural route.” Jennifer and Jackie clarified that kids can be sent home with a major infestation, but not with nits. With parent approval, treatment can be administered at school as well.

Fred noted that the Smoking and Tobacco Use policy ironically omitted cigarettes.

I. Reports

1. Principal's Report

Jackie reported that the lockdown system initiated several times by itself; it has been fixed, but today there were a lot of phone problems that turned out to be the result of the less-than-professional job fixing the lockdown system. The phone problem is being addressed as well. This raises a question about how parents can be contacted when the phone lines are down: we use Blackboard Connect to send out mass messages like this, but Jackie said the town has made it clear she should only use that system when the school is closed. Dan suggested a new policy to make it permissible to use that system in response to similar events. There was a Snow Day last Monday, so the last day of school has been moved up to June 21. Spirit Week was great; 5th Grade won for the class with the most school spirit. The Clean-Up Day is April 29; last year, students felt very proud of themselves for cleaning up. Family conferences just occurred and April Vacation is next week. We're examining next steps for our math curriculum, which is not aligned with new standards. We've decided to radically change the school survey because it is not as insightful as it could be; we're making it shorter (6 questions) and more open-ended. Even though we got 70 responses from last year, they weren't that informative because of the structure of the survey. Dan wondered what Erving is using for math, since they recently revamped their curriculum; they chose what SES now uses. He added that it would be nice to have a more open-ended survey.

2. Superintendent's Report

Jennifer reported that there was a bomb threat presentation put on by the state police yesterday that was very helpful. A member of the Board of Education has requested we identify ways to identify effective teachers because under ESSA, student portfolios are no longer required in teacher evaluations. U#28 has drafted a Mission Statement that is unified enough to reflect our schools' strengths but flexible enough to allow for their unique cultures. We are working with other rural school districts to advocate that the state increase aid to rural districts, specifically introducing a Sparsity Aid fund (Wisconsin has one of \$300 per student, for example). There are about 20 Superintendents who are advocating; she'll keep the school committees up to date as that advocacy proceeds. She also reported that she has crafted a letter to the Superintendents of districts that might be affected by the Revisioning U#28 work, letting them know that that work is underway.

3. Amherst-Pelham Representative's Report:

Steve reported that he invited a group of 8th Graders to make a presentation to the regional school committee on changing the name of Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples Day. The committee voted to endorse them at Town Meeting in order to try to get Amherst to change the name; in any case, the name was changed in the academic calendar. There was a continued discussion about the proposed later starting time; it would amount to pushing back the schools half an hour. That conversation is being tied into the regionalization and combining ARMS and ARHS issues as well. Amherst is now certified to teach the ESL class and hopes to have all middle and high school teachers certified in the near future. Regarding LSSE security, LSSE participants have very little access to most of the building. Steve reported that morale at the middle school is very, very low. Dan responded that a

number of things are being talked about, including Shutesbury paying for part of the refurbishment of the combined school, but we'd still be responsible for the old middle school, which is now being used by LSSE and GCC. Katie noted that many classes were moved to less ideal spaces abruptly when LSSE came in. Dan said there have been big problems with missing equipment at both schools because of these security issues. Amherst really has to think about where it's headed. We're paying for these schools as regional taxpayers, so we should have a say in what happens at those schools. Steve invited thoughts and comments on food services at the regional level; he's joined the working group focused on this. Steve noted that one problem is there's not enough food during the day for students who eat at the earliest lunch period (10:30). Also, during the public comment period on Tuesday, there were a number of people who were concerned that a parent had been asked not to step onto any school grounds in the region, nor to talk to any school committee members.

4. Director of Finance and Operations Report:

Jennifer reported on behalf of Aaron that there's nothing troublesome in the budget report at this point; she'll forward any questions to him.

5. Union #28 Report – including Budget and Personnel:

Dan reported that he went to a MASC meeting last night in Easthampton; it focused on charter schools. He met the President of MTA and learned that there's a lot in the education bill that's very encouraging in terms of creating equity between public and charter schools. Looking ahead, he encouraged committee members to attend the next JSC meeting, when Dorothy Presser will be presenting.

6. CES Report

Dan reported that they are in the process of evaluating the Executive Director.

J. Future Business

- Shutesbury Policy Committee – May 19, 2016 at 6:30 p.m.
- Shutesbury School Committee – May 19, 2016 at 7:00 p.m.
- Budget and Personnel Committee – TBD
- Union #28 Joint Supervisory – Thursday, May 12, 2016 6-8:00 p.m. Shutesbury ES (Dorothy Presser from MASC)
- Shutesbury Town Meeting – Saturday, May 7, 2016
- Future agenda items: Leverett, Pelham, and Amherst talking about regionalizing

K. Adjournment: 8:50

DAN MOVED TO ADJOURN. STEVE SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.